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SOUTH AFRICA ON THE THRESHOLD OF A NEW ERA

Statement by H. E. Professor Ibrahim Gambari (Nigeria), Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid on his re-election on 13 January 1994

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First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the Special Committee against Apartheid for the trust and confidence reposed in my country, Nigeria, as well as myself personally for re-electing me to chair the work of this Committee at this critical time when South Africans are at the threshold of attaining their cherished goal: a new, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa. Since the Committee's establishment in 1962, the possibility of attaining its goals peacefully has never been brighter than it is today. Indeed, our Committee should take the deserved pride in the honourable role that it has played over the years, in mobilizing international support for the elimination of apartheid and in promoting support for the process of peaceful political settlement now very much underway in South Africa.

Our Committee should also be proud of its accurate assessment of events and developments inside South Africa, but above all, its courageous adoption of the two-pronged strategy of pressure and assistance that have been in place in the last three to four years. This approach which accommodated the phased lifting of sanctions, marked a dramatic turning point in political settlement in South Africa.

Last year was remarkable in many respects. It was a year in which for the first time ever, our Committee undertook a fact-finding mission lasting eleven days to South Africa. That mission afforded the members the opportunity to meet with a broad spectrum of high-ranking representatives of major parties, civic, religious, business, labour, media as well as non-governmental leaders at the end of which far-reaching recommendations were made to the General Assembly as reflected in the Committee's report during the 48th session.

In particular, the mission recommended, and this was accepted by the Committee, that in view of the very large number of polling booths (about 10,000) which needed to be effectively monitored, as well as the election process as a whole, deployment of election monitors would need to begin several months in advance of the actual elections.

Similarly, it was a year which witnessed intensive bilateral and multiparty negotiations and of extraordinary political decisions that, in effect, made political developments as well as the process of political settlement in South Africa truly irreversible. It was also a year in which the international community has responded to the political changes in that country by lifting all economic sanctions as well as the oil embargo. The very fact that the General Assembly considered the question of South Africa at its forty-eighth session under a new agenda item title: "Elimination of apartheid and establishment of a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa", was an indication of the acknowledgement of the progress achieved in

South Africa and the forward-looking manner in which the Committee had always conducted its business within the last four years.

The forty-eighth General Assembly session and the general debate on this agenda item last month provided an opportunity for the Member States to express their views on the situation in South Africa. There was significant unanimity among speakers in their assessment of the current situation in South Africa, identifying the areas of concern and indicating objectives for the international community in the upcoming period. All delegates welcomed the progress that had been made toward achieving a political settlement, in particular, the establishment of the Transitional Executive Council and the agreement on an interim non-racial constitution. They also welcomed the lifting of all economic sanctions including the oil embargo. The role of Mr. Nelson Mandela and President F. W. de Klerk in ensuring the success of the negotiations was highly praised, as well as the United Nations' fruitful efforts in encouraging and providing support for the process of political transition.

While it is true that we stand on the threshold of a new South Africa that is full of promises, it must be remembered that the evolving situation is as fraught with uncertainty and danger as it is complex and fragile. Violence, political intolerance, and long unfulfilled expectations still pose great danger to the process of peaceful political settlement.

Political violence has become an orchestrated campaign by the elements opposed to the negotiation process aimed at discouraging as well as frustrating those political forces seeking peaceful transformation of South Africa to a non-racial democratic society. Our fear is that this kind of violence will actually escalate in the run-up to the elections precisely to make a successful outcome impossible.

Despite the enormous and historic progress made in the talks by the multiparty negotiators, differences among parties seeking to shape a post-apartheid future of South Africa still persist. Of particular concern is the continuing insistence by the Conservative Party as well as the Inkatha Freedom Party to suspend their participation in the multiparty negotiations and perhaps withhold their participation in the April 27 elections. They also appear to reject decisions arrived at by the multiparty negotiators as binding on them. These positions, in our view, have the capacity to aggravate the situation in the country and reduce the chances of an early peaceful settlement. We wish to renew our appeal to all those parties to positively reconsider their decision in the interest of all South Africans.

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Similarly, it is our hope that the international community will continue to render necessary financial and economic assistance to a post-apartheid South Africa so that it can consolidate the foundations of the new, non-racial constitutional order and launch the country on a path of sustained growth and development. We in the Committee believe that South Africa, reconciled with itself, has the makings of an economic power-house. Members of the international community that have done so much, individually and collectively, to help bring about the demise of apartheid, cannot stop half-way in their support for the new South Africa where the stakes are enormous not only for South Africa and the Southern African region, but also for Africa as a whole and the world at large.

The general guidelines for the Special Committee's future activities, until the completion of its mandate, which is the establishment of a democratically-elected non-racial government in South Africa, were provided by the General Assembly last December, particularly in its resolution on the Programme of work of the Special Committee.1/ May I add that it was historic, that for the first time, all the resolutions on the question of apartheid were adopted by consensus.

The Special Committee, in concert with the guidelines provided in its Programme of work, is planning to participate in the international Donor's Conference on Human Resources Development for a post-apartheid South Africa. It is the intention of the Committee to continue to convey to potential donors, the urgency of providing massive assistance to the disadvantaged sectors of the populace of South Africa.

The same purpose will be served by a seminar on "Suitable economic growth and development in South Africa: policy priorities for the early years of a democratic government" which will be held in London from 22-24 January 1994. This seminar, which is being organized by the Committee in conjunction with the London School of Economic and Political Science, is primarily intended for financial and other experts from South Africa and its purpose is to help to inform the continuing economic policy debate over priorities for immediate action once a new government is in place. Experts from the United Nations specialized agencies and bodies as well as from the African Development Bank, the Commonwealth, the European Community and the Organization of African Unity have also been invited.

The international anti-apartheid movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a crucial role through the long difficult years of struggle against apartheid. Their support also for the change now agreed on by the South Africans themselves remains vital in the transition period. Their energy and commitment can bring important contributions to the efforts now needed for the reconstruction of South Africa.

In this regard, we are planning to organize a strategy session with international anti-apartheid movements and NGOs sometime in March to discuss their role and the contributions they can bring to a peaceful transition.

I have just highlighted the main activities projected for the remaining period of the life of the Special Committee against Apartheid. Certainly as Chairman, I shall continue to consult thoroughly with the members of the Committee and, indeed, Member States of the United Nations in the difficult months ahead as we undertake each of these activities in line with our mandate.

Today, as South Africans anticipate the birth of a new and just society and justifiably look forward to reaping the fruits of their pain and suffering, it is imperative for the international community to walk the last mile with them, until that momentous event in South Africa's history - an end of the apartheid era and the establishment of a non-racial democracy is attained.

It is indeed incumbent upon me as we meet today for the election of our Committee's Bureau, which is generally expected to be the last exercise of this nature in the context of unfolding political events in South Africa, to once again pay special tribute to members of the Committee for their role and steadfastness. Nigeria is indeed deeply grateful to all of you for the confidence you have reposed in her for electing its Permanent Representative to chair the work of the Committee during the last three decades. I am personally grateful for your cooperation and assistance in the work of the Committee from the time I became Permanent Representative of my country and was elected since then to chair the Special Committee.

I should also like to thank the Member States of our Organization for the relentless efforts they brought to bear on this question, which has today made it possible for this inhuman system to be wiped out of the statute books in South Africa. We want to equally thank our distinguished Secretary-General for his perseverance and his dedication in ensuring that this crime against humanity finally receives the appropriate judgement. Our gratitude is also due to the entire staff of the Centre against Apartheid who have continued to work tirelessly under difficult circumstances despite shortage of staffing. I want, on your behalf, to thank Mr. Johan Nordenfelt, for his support and cooperation throughout the period we have worked together.

Finally, the Committee wishes to pay special tribute to the oppressed and dispossessed people of South Africa for their courage, resilience and steadfastness. There is no doubt that the unfolding political events in South Africa is a victory which is truly theirs. It is our hope and prayers that the statesmanship demonstrated in the negotiations that have resulted

in the monumental decisions of the last few months will continue to remain useful in the critical months ahead so that the delivery of a new South Africa on April 27 becomes a living reality. With the attainment of this objective, the international community may take deserved pride in giving the obnoxious system, which has left thousands of hearts permanently distressed, a befitting funeral.

Notes

1/ Resolution 48/159 B.